

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00

USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13

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O R 011116Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4443

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3129

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDEV PDIP LE VT

SUBJ: VATICAN VIEWS ON LEBANON

REF: ROME 10583

1. CHANCES OF RESUMPTION OF SERIOUS MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN LEBANON APPEAR SLIM AT PRESENT TIME. BOTH SIDES REGARD THEMSELVES AS AGGRIEVED BY CIVIL WAR, AND NOT INCLINED TO OFFER COMPROMISES. MOSLEM SIDE (TO INCLUDE LEFTISTS OF NATIONAL MOVEMENT HEADED BY THE LATE KAMAL JUMBLATT) AT PRESENT IS DIVIDED AND WITHOUT STRONG LEADERSHIP, WHILE THE CHRISTIAN SIDE (KFUR FRONT) ASPIRES TO REESTABLISH CLEAR-CUT MARONITE HEGEMONY IN LEBANESE POLITICS, AS BEFORE THE WAR. MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE LEADING TO COMPROMISES AND AGREEMENTS SEEMS UNLIKELY UNLESS AND UNTIL CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO IMPOSE ITSELF POLITICALLY ON BOTH SIDES. GOVERNMENT OF ELIAS SARKIS HAS DEFINITELY DECIDED THAT THAT TIME HAS NOT YET ARRIVED.

2. FOREIGN FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON HAS BEEN VERY LIMITED. USG AID PROGRAM, TOTALING SOME \$50 MILLION IN FY 77, ANNOUNCED IN FEBRUARY, STILL IS LARGEST SINGLE  
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FOREIGN BILATERAL PROGRAM. OTHER PRINCIPAL DONORS TO DATE ARE SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, WORLD BANK, AND ARAB FUND FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. ALL THESE PROGRAMS TOGETHER TOTAL PERHAPS \$200 MILLION -- A FRACTION OF GOL'S ESTIMATE OF \$10 BILLION IN DAMAGES CAUSED BY WAR. FINANCIAL RESOURCES STRICTLY SPEAKING ARE NOT LACKING, SINCE LEBANESE COMMERCIAL BANKS HAVE

CONSIDERABLE SUMS (PERHAPS AS MUCH AS \$1 BILLION), WHICH THEY COULD INVEST LOCALLY BUT ARE UNWILLING TO DO SO BECAUSE OF LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN FUTURE SECURITY AND UNCERTAINTY AS TO HOW GOVERNMENT PLANS TO MANAGE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS.

3. ONE OF MOST DIFFICULT POLITICAL PROBLEMS FACED BY SARKIS GOVERNMENT INTERNALLY IS OPPOSITIONAL ATTITUDE AND INTRANSIGENCE OF TOP LEADERSHIP OF MARONITE CHRISTIAN "LEBANESE FRONT." FRONT "DIRECTORY," WHICH ATTEMPTS TO FUNCTION AS A KIND OF GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE, INCLUDES FORMER PRESIDENTS CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND SULEIMAN FRANGIE, PHALANGE PARTY CHIEFTAN PIERRE GEMAYEL, AND PERE CHARBEL KASSIS, HEAD OF THE ORDER OF MARONITE MONKS. FRONT CONTINUALLY POSES OBSTACLES IN WAY OF EFFORTS BY SARKIS TO REESTABLISH RUDIMENTARY INSTITUTIONS OF THE STATE. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN SARKIS NAMED A NEW ARMY COMMANDER IN MARCH, CHAMOUN AND HIS NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY NEARLY WENT INTO ALL BUT OPEN REBELLION. ROOT PROBLEM WAS VERY SIMPLY THAT SARKIS OUSTED FORMER GENERAL HANNA SAID WHO WAS RESPONSIVE NOT TO ORDERS OF LEBANON'S GOVERNMENT, BUT TO HIS FEUDAL PATRON CAMILLE CHAMOUN. AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE, MILITIAS OF CHAMOUN'S LIBERAL PARTY AND GEMAYEL'S PHALANGE PARTY CONTINUE TO HOLD ON TENACIOUSLY TO GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTIONS, INCLUDING SOURCES OF REVENUE, WHICH THEY ACQUIRED DURING THE WAR. CONFIDENTIAL

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4. TO DEGREE THAT VATICAN EXERCISES INFLUENCE OVER HIERARCHY OF MARONITE CHURCH, PARTICULARLY PERE KASSIS, IT COULD PLAY VERY USEFUL MODERATING ROLE. WE RECOMMEND THAT IN MEETING WITH SILVESTRINI JULY 2, EMBASSY ROME SUGGEST TO HIM STRONGLY THAT MARONITE CLERGY IN LEBANON COULD PLAY MOST USEFUL ROLE INDEED IN BINDING UP THE WOUNDS OF WAR BY GIVING EXISTING GOVERNMENT AS MUCH SUPPORT AS POSSIBLE, BY ENCOURAGING MARONITE POLITICIANS TO DO LIKEWISE, AND BY ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE WITH MOSLEMS AS WELL.

5. FYI. APOSTOLIC NUNCIO, MONSEIGNEUR ALFREDO BRUNIERA, IS NOT A STRONG FIGURE. IF VATICAN WERE TO UNDERTAKE SERIOUS EFFORT TO INFLUENCE CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS IN LEBANON, A MORE AGGRESSIVE PRELATE WOULD, IN OUR VIEW, BE REQUIRED. END FYI. PARKER

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## Message Attributes

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